The Washington Scene

Soviet Thought Centers

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Washington

As the Soviet leaders return to Moscow from their strange pilgrimage to Yugoslavia, and as they indulge in other antics unheard of in Stalin's day, the inquiring reporter in Washington finds himself wondering if anything really basic is happening inside the Soviet system.

He knows that in Moscow there is some relaxation of the police state. He knows that a visa to visit the U.S.S.R. is now easier to obtain—and Mr. Khrushchev has personally invited newsmen to risk the journey. A small number of Soviet farmers are to visit Iowa to see how the tall corn grows, and a like number of American farmers are to visit Soviet collective farms.

Anything significant about this? Any new trends?

The inquiring reporter talks to the Yugoslavs, who keep a close watch on their big neighbor, and they tell him: "Forced labor isn't yielding the returns it once yielded in Russia. Moscow has had to grant larger incentives not only in agriculture but in industry. In Stalin's day, as a dictator he could force the Russians to build bricks without straw. But his successors, no. There must be a carrot as well as a stick. Farm and factory patterns are changing a bit."

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Then the inquiring reporter is reminded by a British colleague that Arthur Toynbee, eminent British historian, forecast the gradual rise of a managerial class in the Soviet Union would one day loosen the dictator's grip. This would happen because the factory managers, engineers, and natural scientists of the new class could not be kicked around as were the ignorant kulaks. They would want some of the better things of life, and they would be so invaluable to the Kremlin that their desires would have to be heeded in part. That managerial class is slowly materializing today.

The inquiring reporter then bethinks him of the Central Intelligence Agency, the coordinating body of the United States Government, where a lot of time is devoted to studying the Soviet Union. And he finds that Allen W. Dulles, director of the CIA, in a thoughtful speech at Columbia University, has suggested that mass education of the Soviet people will "in the long run" destroy the Communist system of government.

How? Mr. Dulles sees the Soviet educational system as having two purposes: (1) To turn out well-educated members of the Communist state who are sanitized and thought-controlled against having dangerously independent thoughts; (2) to train people capable of operating a technically advanced society. The Soviets have encountered real difficulty in pursuing the two goals at the same time, Mr. Dulles declares.

Skyscrapers Everywhere

Some thoughtful Soviet citizens, according to the CIA chief, are beginning to see through their leaders' distortions of history—indeed are beginning to resent the whole system of thought control. There is no sudden mass awakening in the U.S.S.R., by any means. Most people have to devote their major energies to keeping body and soul together. But there has been, for instance, a deemphasis of compulsory ideological slanting in biology and the other physical sciences and in the arts.

"I do not think we can easily give the answer in [illegible] concludes Mr. Dulles, "but one can say with assurance that, in the long run, man's desire for freedom must break any bonds that can be placed around him." This, perhaps, is a universal law, inexorably at work in the Soviet Union as elsewhere. It is significant that a man in Mr. Dulles' position at the head of American overseas intelligence sees evidence that it is.

In Britain, one of the problems facing the Labor Party, which is by no means Marxist, is that it has very nearly run out of effective programs which are popular with the voters. In the Soviet Union it may happen that, in the absence of a ruthless dictator like Stalin, and with the Soviet peoples' own dissatisfaction with their privations and lack of incentives — it may be gradually discovered that the Communist system really doesn't deliver the goods.

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Let's see, then, what various impacts against the Communist "thought - control" state can be listed: The growth of a managerial class, the growth of mass education, the increasing access to the outside world, the demand for incentives, the passing of Stalin and the substitution of less-sure "committee rule" in the Kremlin. And, one more, the remarkable virility of the free-enterprise system in the West, confounding the Communist forecast about its decline and depression.

Nobody expects that Moscow is going to become a democracy tomorrow morning —or that the Bolshoi Theater is suddenly going to start showing "Oklahoma!"; nor is the Soviet Government going to stop building an impressive long-range air force or a big navy, or halt construction on formidable intercontinental guided missiles. Long before communism and the Cominform, Russia was an imperialist power, moving into every political vacuum around its borders and scheming for power.

What these pressures do mean is that some very interesting changes in basic concepts may be—very, very slowly — percolating in the [illegible] worth watching.